

The Town Meeting Coordinating Committee Minutes
October 22, 2007

1. **Meeting** was held at Town Hall in the meeting room on the 1st floor. Present for the meeting were: Phil Jackson, Harry Brooks, Otto Stein, Peggy Roberts, Judy Simpson, Stephanie O'Keeffe, and Carol Gray. The meeting began at 2pm. Town Manager Larry Shaffer joined the meeting at 2:30pm.

2. **Minutes of October 18:** We postponed the review of the minutes until next meeting.

3. **Zoning Orientation:** Carol handed out an evaluation form that could be used for the warrant review and zoning orientation. Peggy pointed out that TMCC had done evaluation forms a couple years back. She said it was somewhat helpful. Peggy pointed out the attendance can be quite low and we might only have 10 or so responses. Stephanie pointed out that we could send the evaluation form out on the list-serve for people to fill out if they saw the reviews on ACTV. Carol made a motion that we use these forms for the warrant review and the zoning orientation. Stephanie and Judy both seconded the motion. Phil said he thought the idea was excellent and he thinks we should do an evaluation form for every event. Phil said he would want to make sure we get the data that we are seeking and we would want to normalize the process. The data may be incomplete. It might be good to have standard responses (e.g., Lichert scales), e.g., to say 20% of the people thought something. He'd like us to think about ways to do it that would have more standardized responses.

Peggy suggested perhaps we should add a question asking how many years viewers have been in Town Meeting. Harry suggested we use a four point not a five point scale. Harry also suggested we put an ad on ACTV directly following the showing of the warrant reviews and zoning orientations. Phil said from his experience, we may get only 15-20% response rate. He has a concern about how we would get the data that is collected on the forms. Carol said she will type all the responses and put them in a memo for the committee. Phil recommends that we put together another forum down the road. He cautioned about rushing to do things down the road, but said he is not opposed to using this form in the interim. Otto says he favors the qualitative rather than quantitative responses. Peggy called the question. All were in favor of using the evaluations.

Phil suggested we change the physical layout of the forum and encourage people to do overhead presentations. Stephanie said we could fit more people in if the room is set up the other way. There was a discussion about publicizing the zoning orientation to new TM members. Phil said the clerk's office can do a print out of all new members. Carol volunteered to call new members to invite them to come to these forums. Harry and Judy said they could help with the calls. Phil said he would get the data of who the new members were and email it to Harry and Carol and drop it off with Judy.

Peggy will sit at the table with the panelists. She and Harry will do the question and answer period together. Harry will set up. Carol will make name signs. Carol will hand out and collect the questionnaires.

4. Meeting with the Town Manager:

Carol recommended we talk to the Town Manager about the idea that the Suggestion Subcommittee had about including the recommendations of various boards on warrant articles on the Motion Sheet. Stephanie said she didn't want to be winging it with the Town Manager so would rather not talk about that at this time. Phil moved to adopt the points of discussion Peggy laid out in the TMCC agenda for talking to the Town Manager. Harry talked a little bit about ACTV developments with cables and other wiring. Stephanie suggested we let the Town Manager know we're working on ACTV issues and we're discussing such, but she doesn't think we should make recommendations to him. Phil said given the time he's been on the committee, this is the first meeting we've had a meeting with the Town Manager as a group. He thinks we should do less of the talking and allow him to share his impressions. He doesn't think we should get into much detail with him. Otto said TMCC had had a meeting with John Musante. Phil made the motion to adopt the list of topics on Peggy's agenda; Judy seconded it. Stephanie clarified that the list was amended to not have recommendations about ACTV. People agreed that was so.

5. Warrant Review: October 25, 7-9pm

Peggy said the warrant review agenda is still in process because people are hard to reach. So far it looks okay. She said it was hard to convince Vince that the 3 petition articles of the Coalition for Sustainable Neighborhoods be grouped together and presented by one person. They had discussed the pairing of the articles concerned with the same areas as those of the Planning Committee. Otto said Yuri Friman decided not to show up to present his petition article. He says he'll have time to present at Town Meeting and that will be enough. Carol moved that we accept the proposed Warrant Review agenda. Otto seconded it. Peggy pointed out that there may be a change because of a possible new article to replace the two zoning articles on professional office uses. All voted in favor of adopting the warrant review agenda.

6. Precinct Meetings:

Carol explained that all precincts have been covered. Peggy said in the fall of 2005, they had meetings with the facilitators of the precincts and passed out guidelines for the facilitators. She said if something is sponsored by TMCC, then we don't want to be advocating anything. Peggy read the guidelines from the 2005. The precinct meeting discussion was interrupted when the Town Manager arrived.

7. Meeting with Town Manager Larry Shaffer

Peggy explained the history of the TMCC. She said it's been almost 2 years since TMCC was included in the bylaws. The mandate is to provide leadership, information, and other duties as requested. TMCC members are elected at Town Meeting for two year terms. We are the only elected committee of Town Meeting. We've worked very hard on providing information. We've tried to get the information out early. We have a subscription list that tries to alert people to information. There's one subcommittee working on suggestions. We're still struggling to deal with suggestions because there are so many. We're working on improving microphone use. We're trying to make Town Meeting

work well as a legislative body. Peggy said TMCC was interested in hearing Larry's suggestions.

Larry said this is the first community he's worked with that had a Town Meeting. It's been very interesting for him to learn the differences. He's worked with many city and town councils. These councils have the ability to adopt town ordinances and do appropriations. That's 99% of what these councils do. In those environments, the executive is always working to advocate positions. One quickly learns what's achievable and what's not. You need to call up council members to ascertain votes to avoid battles on the floor. If we're going to bring it up, we're going to try to win it. You try to tailor your programs to meet what's possible. You only get a few gift votes each year in accordance with the values of the people voting. In partisan issues, all you have to do is check with the town's party leader. They'll say what they need out of it and what the opposition is going to do. Here at Town Meeting, it's such a large group and you can't tell who's going to be in front of you any particular evening. That's an interesting challenge. It's like flying blind. Town Meeting is a much more emotional body and they don't have the same long town memory that council members might have. Most of those people have been around a long time. You know what their voting record is. In Town Meeting you really don't know who's going to be voting and what % of people will be there. You don't know if you'll have the majority, but you can still pitch topics at Town Meeting and you have a chance of getting them through. There's an inability to forge any large constituency in Town Meeting. The level of preparation for Town Meeting members may be less compared to a council member who might spend 10-12 hours preparing for voting decisions.

Carol asked Larry a question about what his ideas were about reforming the budget decision making process. Larry said he was hoping for more consensus between the Select Board and the Finance Committee. He has asked the Select Board to develop a similar timeline for developing budget positions so that the two might be incorporated into the budget. The Town Manager doesn't have to comply with Finance Committee guidelines. It doesn't make sense for the Town Manager to make recommendations absent input from both committees. There shouldn't be any great chasms between what the Town Manager and the policy making boards are thinking. Peggy asked if the tension has been a matter of timing. Larry said he thought so. Some Select Board members realized they had missed the boat in terms of developing recommendations. His proposal to them is that they need to be involved in the proposal early on. The Select Board is a policy board so they should talk about policy. The Finance Committee will talk about how much we're going to spend and the Select Board will talk about how the money is to be spent. We did not have a policy discussion last year. Peggy asked if there is any chance that that the Select Board recommendation could come out with the Finance Committee recommendations. Recently the Finance Committee was already out with their recommendations while the Select Board was still working on their recommendations. The Select Board has endorsed this new approach. It will take some time to accomplish.

Phil commented on Larry's comment about the emotional nature of the Town Meeting body and how the Finance Committee and Select Board work on policy. He asked what Larry sees as Town Meeting's role in that. Phil asked how inequities from year to year could be equalized and what role the Town Manager could play in that. Larry said the Town Manager's job is to stitch together a mosaic of preferences, but he doesn't craft a "blue sky" budget which is basically a wish list. We need to track the budget closely to where the Finance Committee is while also considering the Select Board's policy prerogatives. His job is to bring together a wide variety of perspectives and bring the parties closer together. He gave an example of the 1% increase budget strategy of last Town Meeting.

There was some discussion of last year's Town Meeting and how it was tough with the budget. Harry pointed out that the change in town managers was a significant point. Larry says you need to come in with strong recommendations. Phil said last year there was an A list and B list of things that were out of the budget. He asked if Larry envisioned having a list of priorities of things that will be funded if more money is found. Larry talked about the 'bull pen approach'. The Select Board ought to at least have the Town Manager's input and recommendations, and then it's up to the Select Board whether or not they want to follow them.

Peggy said we are very concerned with the nitty-gritty of how Town Meeting works: How could we get the information out better? How could the meetings be shorter? Larry doesn't see the time issue as a pressing issue. There are people who have questions that need answering. Peggy pointed out that a long time commitment affects who can run for Town Meeting. Larry said that sequencing the articles could help save time. Some articles have a lot of interest (budget) so could go in the beginning, then other less important articles could be at the end. Judy asked if he would like to get to know Town Meeting members better. Larry said he would like that. The more chances he has to get to know members the better. Harry asked about electronic voting. Larry said he loves technology. Harry said it's around \$30,000. Larry said there are 240 members of Town Meeting so the more you can make effective use of their time, that strengthens Town Meeting. You can get right on to the substantive issues. Efficiency is very important to democracy.

Regarding the budget, Peggy said we brainstormed various things for funding (electronic voting, a banner, etc.), but the most significant cost TMCC has right now is the bus tour. Stephanie talked about putting more information about Town Meeting on the website. She said the most consistent suggestion we get about Town Meeting is the need for more information, sooner. Getting information out to members is critical. Peggy pointed out the timing challenges (e.g., from the signing of the warrant to the start of Town Meeting is very short). There was some discussion about how there is some money available for improving audio quality for ACTV. Peggy said this is more important as newspapers shrink away from covering governmental issues. Larry pointed out that young people don't use newspapers much. They use blogs and take information off the internet. Peggy said Kris Pacunas has been wonderful. Harry asked if Larry would like to see a number

of items and prices of things TMCC would like (e.g., a wish list) for Town Meeting down the road. Larry said absolutely.

We thanked Larry for coming and he left.

Continuation of Precinct Meeting discussion:

Otto said we had previously encouraged people to be balanced, but then we leave things up to the individual precincts to decide how they will approach things. Phil said in the spring we were talking about precinct meetings being difficult to organize. He said in the spring TMCC decided if precincts want to have meetings, then they can do so. He said these are really not things we have control over. We can't monitor them. He suggests that the precinct meetings be things that we not take ownership of. He thinks we don't have enough ability to control them. He said Carol might organize precinct meetings not the committee. Stephanie said the precinct meetings are meant to inform town meeting members and there's no reason for us to be a barrier to informing Town Meeting members, it should be getting other views presented. It's essentially equivalent to the expansion of the back table. We're not taking an advocacy position. All that said, she thinks absolutely we should publicize these meetings since they are important to Town Meeting members, but she did not think doing it under the banner of TMCC is appropriate since we cannot guarantee balanced presentations and discussions on controversial articles. Stephanie commended Carol for putting this together, but said it's so important that people not misperceive TMCC. Otto said these meetings are not restricted to Town Meeting members. We're trying to get the neighborhoods involved. Harry recommended for spring that people all bring in names of people who can host meetings. Harry said in the spring we should all take responsibility for getting other viewpoints presented. Phil said the difference between precinct meetings and other forums is that we can't be sure what's going to be said at precinct meetings. It's not our business what gets said and what doesn't get said. While he thinks precinct meetings are important, he suggests that we revisit whether we as a committee want to organize these. When we look at the lists, we have to be careful of the perception of what is going on with the list. From the body's perspective, we don't want people thinking we left someone off or put someone on for any particular reason. Judy said when she goes to Howard's house for the precinct meeting, there sometimes isn't an informed person available to answer questions. Harry read that the duties of the committee were to organize warrant forums open to the public.

Carol moved that we do what Otto said. Stephanie recommended we just say here are the precinct meetings. Peggy suggested we say "TMCC has encouraged precincts to hold precinct meetings and here are the schedules." The sense of the group seemed to be to adopt Peggy's suggestion.

Carol moved that we adjourn, Judy seconded it, and the vote was unanimous to adjourn.

Meeting adjourned approximately 4:04pm.

Submitted by Carol Gray, Secretary